



United States Air Force

Air Force Materiel Command

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FACT SHEET

Protecting Threatened and Endangered Species

Introduction

Eglin Air Force Base is the largest air force base in the free world, including 724 square miles of land area and about 130,000 square miles of controlled airspace overlying land and water. In this setting, Eglin conducts its primary mission of full-service air armament development through weapons system research, development, testing and evaluation; training; space operations; and base and range support. While fulfilling its mission, Eglin also manages its natural resources acting as a steward to protect plants and animals for future generations.

Eglin's habitat is crucial for a variety of threatened and endangered species of plants and animals. Endangered species are those plants and animals that are in danger of becoming extinct throughout all or a significant portion of their range. Threatened species are those likely to become endangered in the foreseeable future. Examples include the Eastern indigo snake and the bald eagle, which are both listed as threatened by the federal government. The federal list changes to reflect the latest available information about various species. The most up-to-date list is available from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Federal and State Law

Passage of the Endangered Species Act of 1973 gave the United States one of the most far-reaching laws ever enacted by any country to prevent the extinction of at risk animals and plants. Why should we save threatened and endangered species? Congress held that these species "are of aesthetic, ecological, educational, historical, recreational and scientific

value to the Nation and its people." The primary goal of the Act is to return at risk species to the point where protection is no longer necessary under the Act.

Under the Act, the Secretary of the Interior, acting through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, has broad powers to protect and conserve terrestrial and nonmarine wildlife and plants that the Secretary finds in serious jeopardy of extinction. The Secretary of Commerce, acting through the National Marine Fisheries Service, has similar authority to protect and conserve marine life.



The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Marine Fisheries Service have established regulations to implement the law. Because habitat destruction is the most serious worldwide threat to wildlife and plants, many of the regulations require protection of habitat considered critical for these species, unless an exemption is granted.

Many states, including Florida, provide additional guidance in establishing and maintaining programs for the conservation of threatened and endangered species. Under a matching funds program, states have been able to increase their efforts to conserve threatened and endangered species through such measures as habitat protection, research and enforcement.

Managing Sensitive Species at Eglin

Eglin is working with federal, state, and other agencies to ensure its actions are not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of any threatened or endangered species.

In 1992, Eglin entered into a cooperative agreement with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission to manage individual species on the base. Eglin has also maintained ongoing relationships with the Florida Department of Environmental Protection



and the Nature Conservancy, which is a private non-profit organization dedicated to the conservation of plants, animals and intact ecosystems.

Eglin follows a natural resources management plan that echoes the goals of the Endangered Species Act. Specific objectives were established to help protect sensitive species. The plan called for an inventory of sensitive species and management activities designed for their protection.

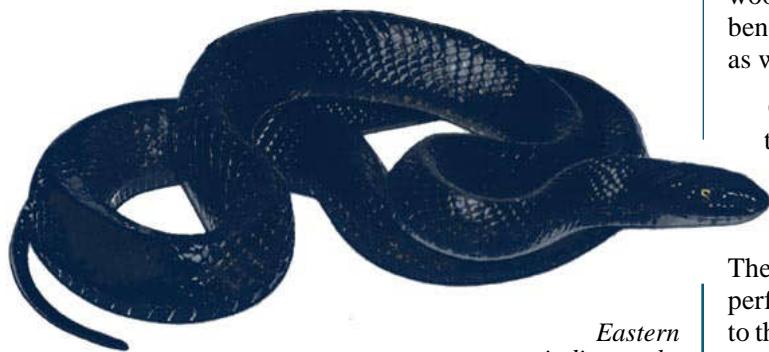
In preparing that inventory, Eglin relied in part upon state and federal lists of threatened and endangered species. Because of different methodologies, Florida's list of sensitive species varies from the federal list. Eglin tracks changes to these lists as new species are added, proposed, or removed from the lists. By knowing what species to watch for, Eglin can better plan its mission activities while preserving sensitive species.

Listing and Delisting Species

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service follows a formal rulemaking procedure to determine which species should be placed on the U.S. List of Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and Plants. Threatened or endangered species are placed on the list, reclassified or delisted through this procedure. The process for listing or reclassifying species involves the public, the scientific community, states, other federal agencies and sometimes foreign governments.

Key issues are evaluated when deciding if a species should be listed or reclassified. They include one or more of the following:

- i Current or potential destruction, modification, or curtailment of habitat or range
- i Overuse for commercial, recreational, scientific or educational purposes
- i Disease or predation
- i Adequacy of current regulatory mechanisms
- i Other natural or manmade factors affecting continued existence.



*Eastern
indigo snake*

Species may be proposed for listing under various priorities. The highest priority is reserved for those species whose at risk status is verified, as in peer-reviewed scientific journal articles by recognized experts. Verified information can also be used to remove a species from the list. A species may be delisted only if data substantiates that it is no longer threatened or endangered. Reasons could include extinction of the species, recovery of populations, or recognition that the original data used to classify the species was in error.

Careful Review Before Potential Actions

Whenever Eglin is considering a mission or other activities at a site, staff use the best scientific and commercial data available to determine the likely effect on sensitive species and habitat. Both federal and state lists are considered.

Informal consultations are held with the regulating agencies at first. If an agency requests additional information, that is provided and analyzed. If no further concerns are raised following formal review, the action may proceed following consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and/or National Marine Fisheries Service.

If concerns are found, mitigating measures or recommendations may be required before the action can be performed, or alternatives may be identified. If concerns remain after considering these measures, a jeopardy opinion would be issued, meaning that the proposed activity should not occur because of the potential to harm sensitive species. While an exemption to a jeopardy opinion can be sought, it is rarely used.

Through careful review, Eglin has been able to balance its primary mission of defense with its mission to improve and preserve habitat for sensitive species.

Habitat Protection: Key to Species Preservation

Natural resource managers at Eglin have targeted their conservation efforts to provide long-term species protection. Special Management Emphasis Areas have been named to focus and prioritize management efforts for the red-cockaded woodpecker and the Okaloosa darter. While these areas benefit the endangered species, they often favor other species as well.

Conservation is crucial for the long-term survival of threatened and endangered species. Eglin's natural resources program has been recognized through conservation awards from the Nature Conservancy, the Air Force and the Office of the Secretary of Defense. These awards are testaments to Eglin's commitment to performing its mission while preserving the environment and to the quality of Eglin's natural resources management team.